

Siblings

Richard Skorupski

Sally: I remember it like it was yesterday. The day started out with snow, but the sun shone through by mid-afternoon. I was worried in the morning because I was in the Christmas Choir, and I didn't want to miss the presentation. I had a reason to worry. Our farm was six miles from the church, and if the snow continued to blow, Father might not have been willing to hitch up the team.

Michael: I remember that day. It was snowing hard. I was glad. I wanted it to snow all day. We were supposed to go to church for the Christmas Eve worship service. I didn't want to go. Why? Because Father would have me outside hitching up the team in the cold. It was enough I had the chores this morning but to go out in the cold again in the evening was just something I didn't relish. Once the milking was done in the afternoon, I wanted to stay indoors. My friend Bobby lent me his copy of *The Virginian* by Owen Wister. He had borrowed it from the library, and I was itching to get started on it. I had to finish it before it was due to be returned. Besides, the only reason we were going was so my little sister could sing in the Christmas Choir.

James: I was very young. I don't remember much of the day. Just the ride home. Father was driving the team while Mother was holding me in her lap. That's when we saw it.

Michael: Well, the weather cleared in the afternoon, so Father had no excuse to stay home. He came to me just as I was getting started on my book and told me we were going to the Christmas Eve service, and we need to get the team and sleigh ready.

Sally: I remember that old wagon. Father turned

it into a sleigh every winter. It was like magic.

One day we would have a simple farm wagon, the next day, it was a charming horse-drawn sleigh to go "Dashing Through the Snow." He even added sleigh bells to the harnesses.

James: It wasn't really a sleigh, not like the ones you would see in photographs. Every year in the late fall Father would remove the wheels from the buckboard and put on the runners. He did that year after year when I was growing up. I didn't think it was a big deal at the time, but looking back, the invention was genius. We had a buckboard in the summer and a sleigh in winter. It took Father and Michael (me as I grew older) half a day to make the conversion. If we got a warm spell, he could switch back to the wheels.

Michael: It was cold that Christmas Eve afternoon. Cold and crisp. The wind turned and was out of the North. That brought cold, dry air to the valley. Father had me get the sleigh ready and bring up the team. I remember grouching about the cold. Not that it was colder than any other day in December. It was the book I wanted to read. All the time I was hitching up the team and setting the harnesses, I was thinking about the novel I left sitting on the side table near the fireplace. I wanted to be inside and warm much more than I wanted to ride six miles through the cold just to hear my sister's screeching voice in some stupid choir.

James: Those winter days when I was a boy were some of my favorite times. I never noticed the cold. I suppose it was because I didn't know better. It was winter, after all.

Father would make sure we would get to the church early. My friends and I would play Fox and Geese in the churchyard while the adults were visiting. Since I was one of the younger boys, I got tagged more than most. As the years passed, I got faster and a bit smarter at the game.

Sally: We got to the church with plenty of time. I went behind the altar to the Pastor's anteroom to meet with the choir. I was very excited. This would be the first time I would sing with the choir for Christmas. Last year I was twelve, and they said I was too little. This year, I was to be the second soprano. We had four songs to sing.

Michael: Once we got to the church, I moved up to the balcony seats. That was where all the teenage boys and girls sat. We could visit and talk without our parents being in earshot. Besides, the balcony was the warmest place in that old drafty church. Bobby asked me about the book. I had to tell him I hadn't had time to start it with all the chores. He told me he needed it back no later than next Sunday so he could drop in the door slot at the library.

As with all young people, romance was like a perfume cloud over our heads. While I was interested in Mary Jones, I didn't have the courage to let it show. I watched her as she tried to get the attention of David Gurling. It bothered me that she chose him over me, but I had no idea how to do anything about it.

Sally: Our time had finally come, and we gathered on the dais for our first song. I was excited. I remember wishing I had visited the outhouse before the service. Looking back, I believe it was just butterflies. The Pastor introduced our choir leader, and he raised his arms. We started with "*Oh Little Town of Bethlehem*."

James: I remember those special church events. Christmas Eve was one of them. After the service, we would gather at the back of the church and share our treats. Some brought Christmas cookies, others hard candy. There were treats galore all of us tried to get our fill. Mother would chastise us for being too covetous and remind us of the tenth commandment. I learned over the years to be more

discreet and hide my bounty from my Mother's eye.

Michael: I had the chance to sit next to Mary Jones after the service. We talked a little, but she kept looking over at David. After a while, I got up and went out to the horses.

It wasn't long before Father limped up. The cold was getting to his bad leg; he couldn't hide the pain like he did most days. Father asked if I needed help. I said I'd take care of it if he could gather the family. Nodding, he walked away.

Sally: It was after we left the church. We were on our way home. The night had become crystal clear. Laying back in the wagon bed and looking straight up, there appeared to be a million stars. I was picking out the constellations when Father spoke up.

Michael: Father was the first to point out the Northern Lights. He pointed to the northern sky. James asked what caused them. He said he wasn't sure, but they looked to him like angels dancing on the horizon.

James: I saw the Northern Lights and asked Father how they were made. He told me they were angels dancing on the wind. It was a good enough explanation for a seven-year-old boy. I watched the lights turn and twist. It did look like dancing to me.

Sally: Then we all saw it. Out of the ground rose a bright white plume. It was bigger and brighter than anything we had seen that night. It rose and spread out to look like a large palm tree. Just under it, a cloud moved, and the brightest star I have ever seen shone through. We were all quiet for a minute.

Michael: We all stared at this giant palm tree. Suddenly, as if out of nowhere, a bright star appeared under the palm. I didn't know what to think of it.

James: It took my breath. It was as if the angels were pointing the way. Just like they did on that Christmas so many years ago.

Sally: Staring at the star as the palm tree faded, I thought about one of the songs the choir sang earlier. I started singing, and after the first line, everyone joined in.

O holy night the stars are brightly shining,
It is the night of the dear Savior's birth.
Long lay the world in sin and error pining,
'Til He appeared, and the soul felt its worth.

A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn!
Fall on your knees!
O hear the angel voices!
O night divine! O night when Christ was born!
O night, O holy night, O night divine!

James: We followed that star all the way home that Christmas. The next morning it was all we could talk about. We were reminded of the three magi following the star to see the Lord.



Mortimer's Memories

Roger Bommersbach